



Association of Salmon Fishery Boards

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Richard Lochhead MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment
St Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Mr Lochhead,

Congratulations on your re-appointment as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment.

Thank you for signing our pledge *'to work towards the protection of our iconic wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout and the habitats on which they depend'*. I look forward to working with you and your officials in order to achieve this shared aim.

On a related theme, I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate the ASFB's support for the Esk District Salmon Fishery Board's application for an extension to annual close time and salmon conservation regulations. The ASFB share the Esk Board's frustration at the length of time taken to process this application, which was originally submitted in July 2010. We are also concerned that the issue is being portrayed, in some quarters, as a simple argument between netting and angling interests. We would like to emphasise that the ASFB's support is based solely on the conservation of the fragile spring stock component of these iconic fish and is not predicated on the wider argument relating to the mixed stock nature of coastal salmon netting.

As I noted in my letter of 21 March 2011, the River South Esk is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for Atlantic salmon and currently the conservation status for Atlantic salmon in the River South Esk SAC is *'unfavourable recovering'*. A detailed seasonal analysis of 17 Scottish rivers designated as SACs undertaken by Marine Scotland Science on behalf of the Mixed Stock Fisheries Working Group¹ suggests that there has been a decline in the salmon caught in the spring stock component (Jan-May) in the majority of these rivers, including the South Esk, since records started in 1952.

I would also like to take the opportunity to highlight some of the projects that the Esk Board has undertaken to protect and improve the quality of Atlantic salmon habitat on the River South Esk. Proprietors have invested considerably in ensuring that existing barriers comply with regulations (e.g. Kinnaird Dam). In 2010, a fish pass was installed on the Pow Burn which will provide access to over 30km of habitat at a cost of £27,674. The EU LIFE Project resulted in approximately 40km of electric fencing being installed in Glen Clova to reduce erosion by livestock (Project cost €207,810). Planning has recently been completed to reconnect the Rottal Burn with its flood plain, which will result in an increase in available habitat (Project costs: £25,988). All spring salmon are released by anglers and have been for the last 6 years. However, despite this significant investment in conservation measures, the Stock Assessment Tool

¹ *Mixed Stock Fisheries Working Group Paper (MSFWG0910)*

promoted by Marine Scotland indicates that management action to protect stocks should be considered for the South Esk for the period from February to June inclusive

I would also emphasise that the marine phases of both Atlantic salmon and sea trout have been included on the draft list of Priority Marine Features drawn together by SNH - the habitats and species of *greatest conservation importance* in inshore waters. We believe therefore that the Esk Board's application should be considered in the light of the Scottish Government's Nature Conservation Strategy, and particularly under the 'wider seas pillar' of the 3-pillar approach. This is perhaps the first opportunity to deliver a significant marine nature conservation outcome for a priority marine species under the wider seas pillar since the passing of the Marine (Scotland) Act and the finalisation of the MNC Strategy.

I hope that you recognise the conservation imperative in protecting the fragile spring salmon component on the South Esk. I would very much welcome an early opportunity to meet with you to further discuss this issue, and other key issues of importance to the wild fisheries sector.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Alan Wells
Policy & Planning Director - ASFB

Further Support for the Esk DSFB Application

The nature conservation case for this management option is supported by the Marine Conservation Society.



Calum Duncan
Scotland Programme Manager, Marine Conservation Society

WWF Scotland supports these proposals to help to safeguard wild Atlantic salmon.



Dr Dan Barlow
Head of Policy, WWF Scotland